



THE ADVOCATE

Meet us
on page 2A

THE INDEPENDENT VOICE OF SOUTH LOUISIANA



TODAY'S WEATHER
Morning clouds.
High: 92. Low: 72.
DETAILS: 10B



Giant in women's basketball' Sue Gunter dies

BY SCOTT RABALAIS
Advocate sportswriter

Sue Gunter, whose hall of fame career in women's basketball spanned virtually the entire history of the game, died Thursday morning at her home in Baton Rouge.

Gunter, who stepped down as LSU's coach in early 2004 because of complications from emphysema, was 66.

Funeral arrangements in Baton Rouge are pending. Gunter will be buried alongside her parents at Mount Zion Cemetery in her hometown of Walnut Grove, Miss.

Gunter coached women's college basketball for 40 seasons, the last 22

► Scott Rabalais reviews Gunter's career. 1D
► Death evokes emotional response. 1D

at LSU where she had a 442-221 record. She was 708-308 for her career, which included stops at Middle Tennessee State and Stephen F. Austin in Texas.

Gunter ranks fourth in wins in NCAA women's basketball history, third in games coached (1,016) and sixth in 20-win seasons (22).

She has been elected to the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame, in Springfield, Mass., where she will be inducted in September.

Gunter was inducted into the

Women's Basketball Hall of Fame in 2000, the Mississippi Sports Hall of Fame in 2003 and the Louisiana Sports Hall of Fame in June.

"Not only have I lost a great friend and mentor, but the game of basketball has lost one of its true pioneers," LSU women's coach Pokey Chatman, who played and coached under Gunter from 1987-2004, said in a written statement.

"She not only made a huge differ-



Gunter

ence in my life, but in the life of everyone associated with women's basketball."

Chatman returned Thursday from Colorado Springs, Colo., where she has been serving as an assistant coach on the U.S. Women's World University Games team.

The team, which includes LSU All-American Seimone Augustus and Lady Tiger center Sylvia Fowles, is scheduled to compete Aug. 10-21 in Izmir, Turkey.

LSU women's basketball assistant coaches Bob Starkey, Carla Berry, Joey Carvalhido and other friends and family were with Gunter when she died, according to Starkey.

As news of her death spread, tributes for Gunter immediately flowed from across the world of women's basketball.

"We've had some real giants in this business," former Louisiana Tech coach Leon Barmore said. "Three or four come to mind: (Tennessee coach) Pat Summitt, (Texas coach) Jody Conradt and Sue Gunter."

"I think all of us involved in women's basketball owe Sue Gunter a debt of gratitude for what she gave this game. I don't know if it would be what it is if not for what she gave."

"She was one of my mentors," said

► Please see **GUNTER**, page 8A

GUNTER

Continued from page 1A

Summitt, who became college basketball's all-time winningest coach in March. "I learned so much from Sue about the X's and O's of the game of basketball.

"But more importantly, she taught me about the delicate balance of coaching and teaching the game and the value of great player-coach relationships. She made playing basketball fun due to her ability to connect with her players. Personally, I am going to miss her tremendously."

In the history of LSU athletics only four coaches served longer than Gunter: former men's tennis coach W.T. "Dub" Robinson (1947-74), former men's basketball coaches Dale Brown (1972-97) and Harry Rabenhorst (1926-42, 1945-57) and current gymnastics coach D-D Breaux (since 1977).

"Sue and I had a relationship that went further than on the basketball court," Brown said. "Our teams supported each other. They went to each other's games. We watched the other team practice.

"There was not one time Sue and I had a conflict. It was just the opposite. We were always friends. She was gallant right until the end."

Flags at the LSU Parade Ground were lowered to half-staff Thursday in Gunter's honor. A banner hung in the Pete Maravich Assembly Center last year chronicling Gunter's career achievements was draped over the outer concourse of the Assembly Center on Thursday facing Tiger Stadium.

"She makes me proud to be a coach," said LSU Athletic Director Skip Bertman, the school's baseball coach from 1984-2001. "She did it right."

Born in rural Leake County, Miss., on May 22, 1939, Gunter grew up

playing basketball in an age when women played half-court basketball with six players on each side.

There were no college programs for women. While Gunter attended Peabody College in Nashville, Tenn., which is now part of Vanderbilt University, Gunter played for the highly respected Nashville Business College AAU team from 1958-62.

A point guard, Gunter earned All-American honors in 1960. She was a member of a U.S. national team that faced the Soviet Union in a series of games from 1960-62.

"A lot of people don't realize how good a player she was," said Joe Dean, former LSU athletic director and men's basketball player. "They (NBC) were the best in the country, maybe in the world."

Gunter began her coaching career at Middle Tennessee in 1963. She led her teams to a 44-0 record in two seasons, though the NCAA does not count those wins because of inadequate record keeping.

In 1965, Gunter moved on to Stephen F. Austin in Nacogdoches, Texas. She led SFA to a 266-87 record from 1968-80 (the only seasons recognized by the NCAA), five top 10 finishes and five appearances in the AIAW national tournament, a predecessor to the NCAA women's tournament.

"The SFA athletics family was saddened today to learn of Sue's passing," Stephen F. Austin Athletic Director Robert Hill said. "She meant so much to this campus and the city of Nacogdoches. She was truly one of the greats in women's basketball."

Barmore recalled the intense rivalry between Louisiana Tech and Stephen F. Austin.

"Sue was such a gentle person but yet she'd scratch and claw to get every point and every win," Barmore said. "But she wouldn't take the shirt off your back. She'd leave you a few threads."

Sue Gunter bio

Years at LSU: 22
Overall Record:
 708-308 (40
 years)
LSU Record: 442-
 221 (22 years)
Hometown: Walnut
 Grove, Miss.
Born: May 22,
 1939



Gunter

Alma Mater (Year): Peabody College
 (1962); Masters - Peabody College
 (1962)

PLAYING CAREER

Played guard for Nashville Business College (AAU) from 1958-62, earning All-America honors in 1960; Member of U.S. National team, which competed against the Soviet Union from 1960-62.

COLLEGIATE COACHING EXPERIENCE

Head coach Middle Tennessee State 1963-64; Head coach Stephen F. Austin 1965-80; Head coach LSU 1982-2004.

INTERNATIONAL COACHING EXPERIENCE

Head coach 1976 U.S. National team; Assistant coach 1976 U.S.

Olympic team (silver medal); Head coach 1978 U.S. National team; Head coach 1980 U.S. National team; Head coach 1980 U.S. Olympic team.

HONORS

2005 Elected to Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame
 2005 Inducted into Louisiana Sports Hall of Fame
 2003 WBCA Regional Coach of the Year
 2003 Louisiana Coach of the Year
 2003 Mississippi Sports Hall of Fame Inductee
 2002 Louisiana Coach of the Year
 2000 Women's Basketball Hall of Fame Inductee
 1999 SEC and Louisiana Coach of the Year
 1999 WBCA District III Coach of the Year
 1997 SEC Coach of the Year
 1994 Carol Eckman Award winner
 1983 Basketball News National Coach of the Year
 1983 Converse Region IV Coach of the Year
 1983 Louisiana Coach of the Year
 1980 United States Olympic team head coach

In 1976, the U.S. fielded its first Olympic women's basketball team. Olympic coach Billie Moore, then coach at UCLA, had only one opening for an assistant.

She immediately chose Gunter.

"No one else was really on my list," Moore said. "We didn't have advanced scouting or videotape. It was really a matter of choosing someone with great instincts and great feeling for the game. It was an easy decision."

Gunter missed the opening ceremonies in Montreal and the United States' opening game against Japan because of the death of her father.

She returned to Mississippi, then went back to Montreal and helped the United States to a silver medal.

Gunter was to serve as head coach of the 1980 U.S. Olympic team. It was a talented squad that included future hall of famers Carol Blazejowski, Anne Donovan, Denise Curry and Lynette Woodard.

The U.S. went 6-1 en route to winning the Olympic qualifying in Bulgaria, but that's as close as Gunter's team would get to Moscow. President Carter ordered a boycott of the Moscow games because of the Soviet Union's 1979 invasion of Afghanistan.

The USSR won the gold, Bulgaria the silver, Yugoslavia the bronze.

"Sue never got the breaks," said Texas A&M coach Gary Blair, former coach at SFA and Arkansas. "In 1980, our Olympic team probably would have won. Her name would have been a national name. Russia was good, but we could have started our run of championships then."

Gunter refused to be bitter.

"It was difficult for the kids to understand," Gunter said in 2000. "For 90 percent of the athletes, it was their one chance. I just felt I missed my shot."

Gunter returned to college coaching at LSU in 1982. Her first Lady Tiger team went 20-7 and she was named Basketball News' National Coach of the Year. Gunter's second team went 23-7 and made the first of 14 NCAA tournament appearances during her tenure.

Her 1984-85 team won the National Women's Invitational Tournament title. A year later, the Lady Tigers went 27-6 and lost to Tennessee 67-65 in the NCAA Mideast Regional final.

Five straight NCAA appearances and three 20-win seasons followed, including a Southeastern Conference Tournament title in 1991. Then the LSU program struggled, going 43-67 from 1991-95 as Gunter grappled with her own health problems and her mother's battle with Alzheimer's disease.

"As that period was ending she came to my office and said, 'Don't fire me, give me one more year,'" Dean recalled.

"I said, 'Sue, I have no intention of firing you,' but I also said we really needed to start moving now. That's when she picked up the pieces."

Gunter's 1995-96 team went 21-11 and returned to the NWIT. Her teams never failed to reach postseason play again. In 2000, LSU went 25-7 and reached the NCAA East Regional final.

Gunter's best seasons came at the end of her career. Her 2002-03 team went 30-4, won the SEC tournament again and earned the first No. 1 NCAA regional seed in the program's history. LSU again reached the final eight, losing in the West Regional final to Texas.

The Lady Tigers went 27-8 in 2003-04 and finally gave Gunter her first Final Four appearance — LSU lost 52-50 in New Orleans to Tennessee.

Unfortunately for Gunter, she didn't see the game in person. Preparing for a home game against Arizona on Jan. 4, 2004, Gunter stopped breathing and blacked out.

"That's when the struggle began," Gunter said in August 2004 at an LSU banquet in her honor. "Suddenly, I was old. Suddenly, the career was over. I didn't know that, but it was."

Emphysema forced Gunter to hand the program over to Chatman and begin using an oxygen tank.

LSU coaches and officials asked Gunter to take a seat on the bench for the Final Four, but she decided to watch from the team hotel instead.

"When she couldn't coach in New Orleans, it just broke my heart," Summit said.

In April 2004, Gunter officially retired with Chatman named as her successor. She attended only a handful of LSU games after that as her health deteriorated.

Gunter's legacy remains in her former players and coaches. A legacy that LSU men's coach John Brady said extends beyond wins and losses.

"The thing that outweighs everything is that as great a coach as she was, she was a better human being," Brady said. "Maybe that's why she was such a great coach. The qualities of her personality and character show up in her coaching."

*Advocate sportswriters
Robin Fambrough
and Randy Rosetta
contributed to this report.*